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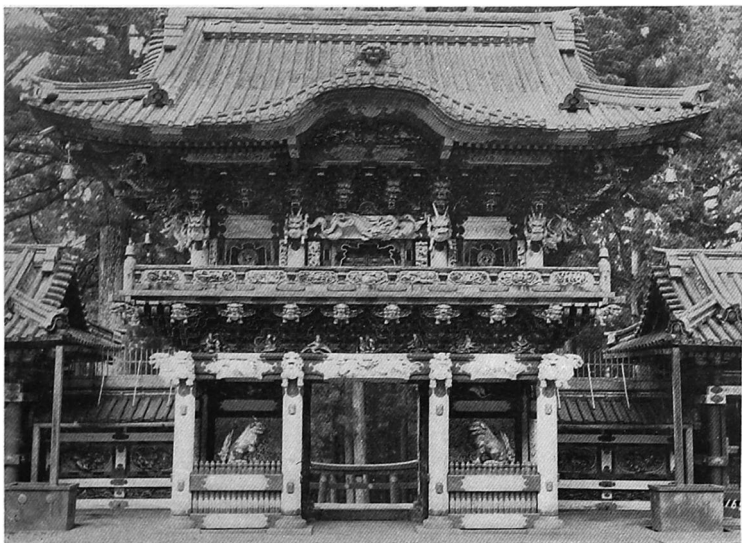
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FRONT VIEW OF AN INNER TEMPLE
Courtesy H. Deakin

JAPANESE WOOD-CARVING

The art of Japan has of recent years become the subject of the most careful study throughout the western world, and many of the ablest artists of the Occident have humbly borrowed from their Oriental brethren. When the haughty but mistaken isolation of the Japanese was broken, and Europeans began to overrun the island, the art treasures which were secured and carried to the western markets were a source of wonder to those who previously had been unacquainted with the unique treatment of form and line and the rich, subdued coloring that obtained in the Mikado's empire. Even the cheaper grades of work and the Europeanized prints became a vogue. As the better class of products found their way westward, their exceptional cleverness and beauty maintained the interest that was at first excited largely by the element of the unusual, and the influence of Japanese design and Japanese coloring soon began to be felt in the art, especially the decorative art, of the west.

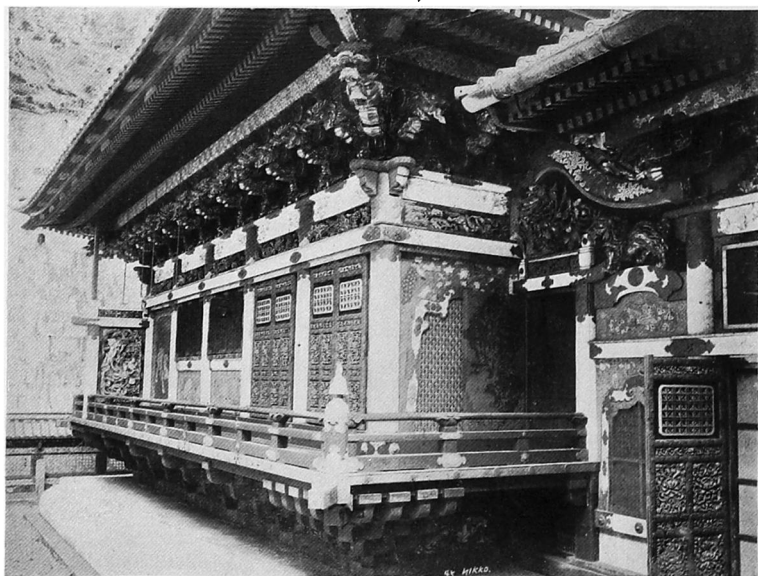
In this study of Japanese art, however, wood-carving was singularly overlooked, which is due probably to the fact that only miniature carvings, the well-known *netsuke*, or ornaments for pouches and garments, were brought to Europe. And yet, in no country in the

world has wood-carving been practiced to such an extent and carried to such a degree of perfection as in Japan.

In the island empire, wood sculpture is more common than sculpture in stone is in the western world. It is the prevailing form of ornamentation, both exteriorly and interiorly, for temple and mansion, and even for cottage. It is only by visiting the country, and actually seeing its wealth of artistic wood sculpture, that one can form an idea of its extent and beauty.

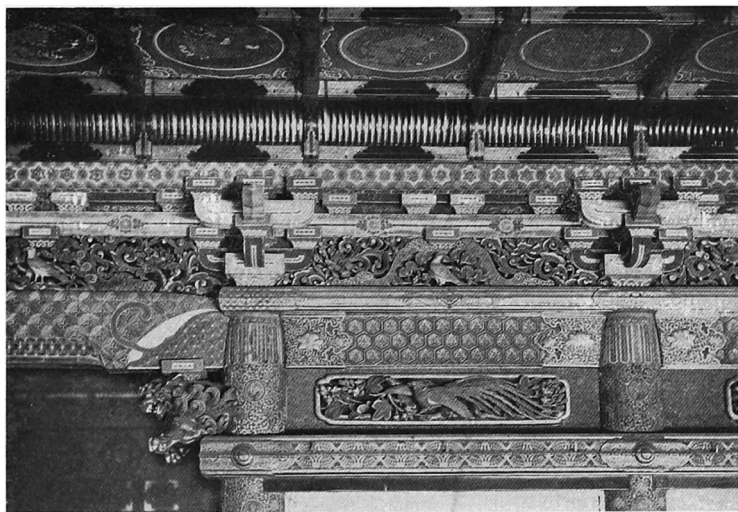
It should be noted here that wood-carving in Japan was the direct outgrowth of certain conditions. As is commonly known, sculpture in stone in the west assumed importance with the development of architecture, and was most freely used in cathedrals and public buildings where length of time could be had for its elaboration and public funds could be commanded to meet the expense. The initial stages of wood-carving in Japan were precisely the same, and the greater ease with which fine wood sculpture could be effected, and its relatively smaller expense, are probably responsible for its greater prevalence in buildings of a cheaper character.

That wood should be selected as the medium in which the Japanese should work out their ideals is due primarily to the preva-



AN INNER TEMPLE
Courtesy H. Deakin

lence of earthquakes and earth tremors, which virtually forbade the erection of stone buildings. Disastrous experiences, often repeated, early taught the Japanese builders to construct all their edifices of a material well calculated to withstand seismic disturbances. Besides this, there was at hand abundant timber capable, by its texture, of withstanding the ravages of time. There are to-day in Japan temples

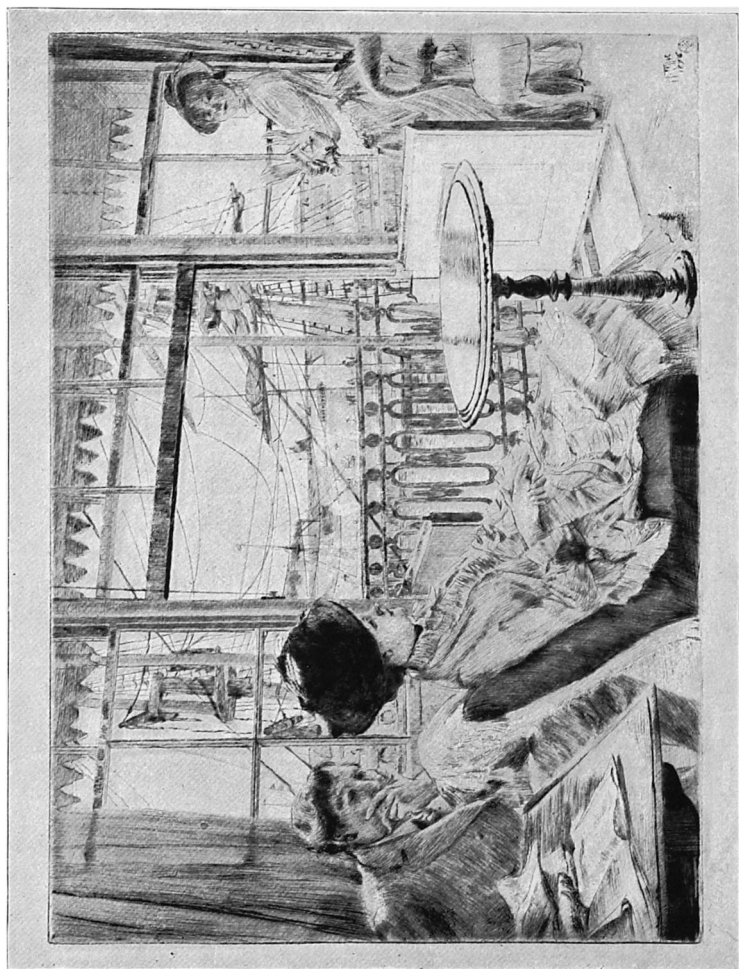


CARVED FRIEZE OF AN INNER TEMPLE
Courtesy H. Deakin

ten or more centuries old in which the sharp lines of the wood sculptures scarcely show the signs of wear.

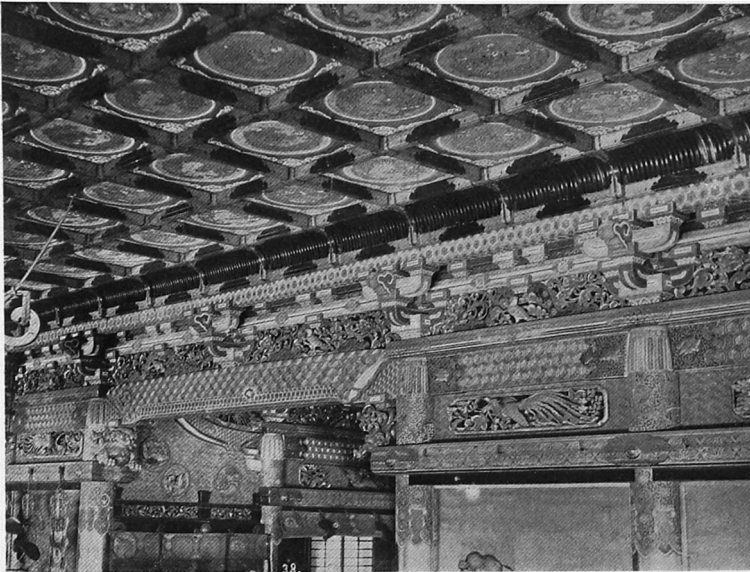
As might naturally be expected under these conditions, wood-carvers in Japan assumed a rank and importance comparable with the position occupied by the sculptors in stone and marble in the palmy days of Greek art; and as has been well said, Hidaro Jingro, the first, as he was perhaps the greatest, of the Japanese wood carvers, was as much revered in his country as Phidias was in Greece.

Wood sculpture, in a sense, became a national art, and when once it had become adopted in the country, it was refined and elaborated in every particular, with the one possible exception of portraiture, during succeeding ages. The work was more boldly conceived and was executed with an ever-greater measure of nicety. Indeed, the material used gave opportunity for effects that could scarcely be approximated



LE MATIN
By J. James Tissot
Courtesy Albert Roullier





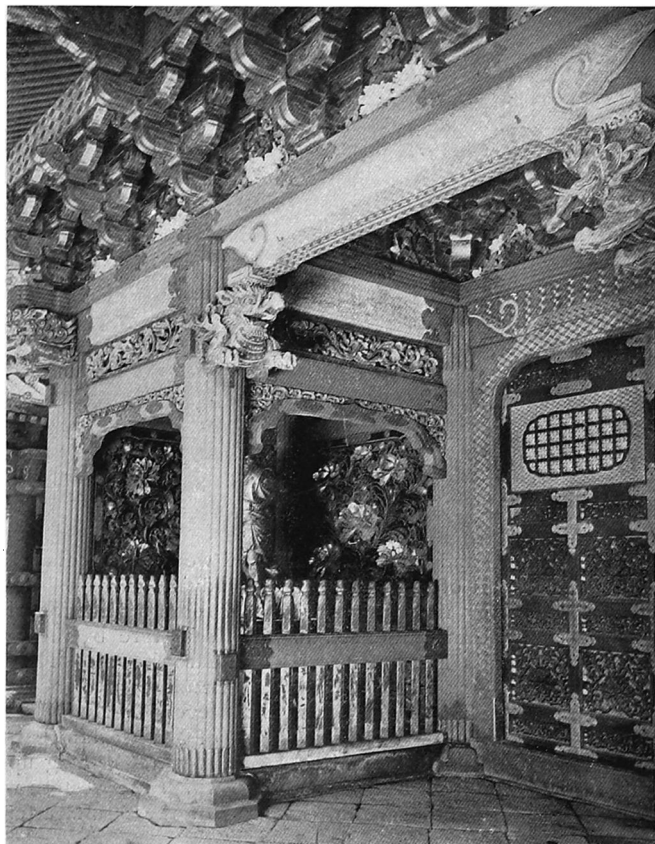
TEMPLE FRIEZE AND CEILING, EMPEROR'S ROOM
Courtesy H. Deakin

in a medium as hard and brittle as stone, and wood, rather than being a detriment to the art of carving, proved an advantage.

The accompanying illustrations will give some suggestion of the rich and beautiful forms produced in wood sculpture by the artists who followed Japan's first great carver, Hidaro Jingro. They are made from photographs taken by royal edict and not designed to go out of the empire. They were secured, however, by Henry Deakin from the photographer, and it is by courtesy of Mr. Deakin that they are now reproduced for the first time. An art which sprang up and bloomed in such wondrous beauty, and with which the western world has so little to offer in comparison, is worthy of the careful attention of American students.

It would appear that the art of wood-carving in Japan was for a long time employed exclusively for the decoration of temples, and was only gradually used for the embellishment of secular buildings. The first impetus came from Korea, and the first teachers the Japanese had were Korean artists. It is even maintained by specialists that a higher degree of excellence in figure sculpture obtained during the age immediately following the introduction of wood-carving into Japan than was ever reached in later times by the native sculptors.

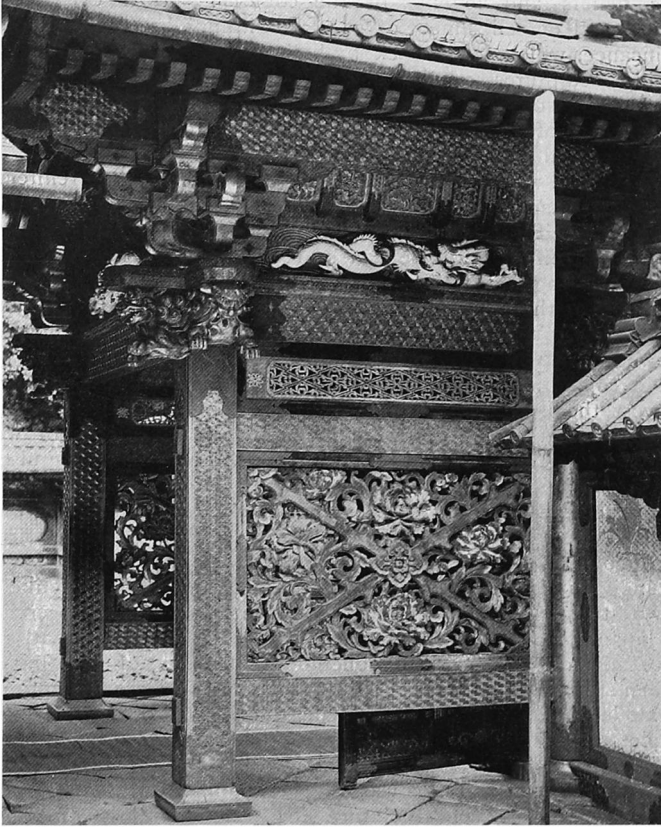
“The actual history of carving in wood,” says William Anderson, “is closely associated with that of Buddhism, the earliest sculptors of whom mention is made in the Ni-hon-gi having been



WOOD-CARVINGS IN TEMPLE OF IEYASU
Courtesy H. Deakin

engaged for the purpose of building Buddhist temples and making idols. At this time the occupations of carpenter, architect, and sculptor appeared to have been united into a single guild. Thus artisans who displayed more than common skill in the use of the tools were selected for the task of cutting flowers, birds, and other

ornamental work required for the decoration of the building, or of its internal equipment of altars, tables, etc., but were not especially distinguished above their fellows, and probably shared with them in the more mechanical labors of the calling."



ENTRANCE TO INNER TEMPLE OF IEYASU
Courtesy H. Deakin

It is not the purpose of this article to trace, even in outline, the history of wood-carving from the establishment of a native school of sculptors in the seventh century. Suffice it to say, that throughout the Japan of to-day one may find innumerable remarkable examples of the art, both in figure sculpture and in sculpture of a purely orna-

mental character, that would put to the blush the most noted wood-carvers of the western world.

To the natives these sculptures mean more than mere decoration. Being intimately connected with the decoration of temples, wood-carving in Japan is almost of necessity closely linked with the religious beliefs and legends of the country. Much even of the architectural embellishment of secular buildings has thus a symbolic significance, which leads back by belief or tradition to earlier days. The idol sculptures scarcely meet the requirements of western taste, savoring more or less of the grotesque and even of the repellent, but the carvings of a purely ornamental character are superb, both in conception and in execution.

We of the west naturally have most interest in the architectural embellishments and will find most profit in studying the purely decorative work. This, however, was the culmination of seven or eight centuries of effort, and one can scarcely pass over in silence these centuries during which the Japanese wood-carver was an idol-maker. From the sixth to the sixteenth century the Japanese idol-maker worked under the direction of Korean and Chinese teachers, and followed closely Korean and Chinese models.

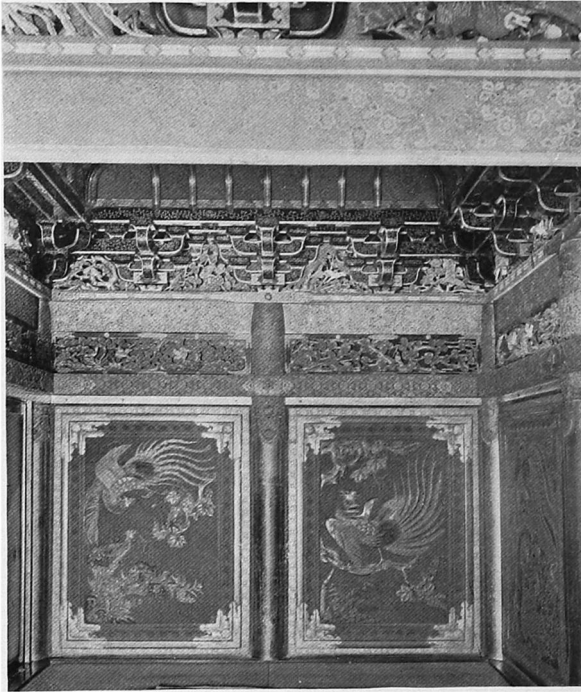
He commonly painted or gilded his wooden statues, and sought to invest them with some suggestion of life other than that of mere form. His larger statues were made of several pieces of wood, securely and deftly fastened together in such a way as to disguise the joints, and his smaller statues carved from a single piece of timber he often covered with a composition which was lacquered and decorated in such a way as to give results surpassing the skill of western artists.

Of course the majority of these statues are destitute of character and individuality, but many of them are wonderfully lifelike and show a study of human anatomy which we are not wont to credit to the Japanese. As eminent a specialist in Japanese art matters as Mr. Anderson is forced to conclude that many of the Japanese wooden statues still extant and in good condition are exceptionally fine models of portraiture, reproducing the features of individuals with complete accuracy.

The art of idol-making reached its highest development in the sixteenth century, and this was the beginning of the era of purely decorative work. Wood-sculpture for architectural decoration did not become prevalent as an elaborate system much before the sixteenth century. Tentative efforts in this branch of the art, however, were doubtless made at a much earlier period. The temples and residences at first were severely plain and savored of Chinese models, and the first pretentious architectural carvings were those employed in the mausolea of Shiba, Uyneo, and Nikko.

The leader in this new movement was a simple carpenter, Hidaro Jingro, in 1594. He, in a sense, was to Japanese wood-carving

what Hokusai was to Japanese drawing, and his work attracted so much attention that architectural wood-carving became a vogue, and the sculptors, whose work had previously been limited to the execution of mechanical designs and conventional flowers, soon banded themselves into a guild and developed their art to the highest degree.



EMPEROR'S ROOM, SHOWING PANELS IN PLACE
Courtesy H. Deakin

As has been well said, wood-carving soon became the life and soul of Japanese architecture, and it stands to-day unique and unsurpassed.

The Japanese wood-carvers are pre-eminent in this, that even in the commoner kinds of purely decorative work, they are creative artists. They are not slavishly bound to set forms or rules, and do not interminably wreak changes on a few conventional models. Every artist designs for himself and gives free play to his imagination. He discloses the most careful study of the real and the liveliest fancy as to the unreal. As a consequence, his work speaks to the

beholder in ever-varying tones, and displays the beauties of nature and the fantastic conceptions of the mythical world in almost endless forms.

Japanese wood sculpture, therefore, is not a monotonous repetition of conventional forms, but is instinct with the individuality and genius of the carver. For this reason the wood-carvings of the island appeal to one practically in the same way as do paintings of the western world, and one finds in them virtually the same sort of pleasure.

In the better class of buildings in Japan, and especially in the temples, one finds the greatest variety of animal and floral enrichments—lions, tigers, unicorns, tapirs, mythical creatures, delicate bamboo effects, leaves and flowers of every description, animals held sacred by religious belief and tradition, birds of every description, landscapes with hill, valley, and stream, and skies with fine cloud effects. All these are executed in the better class of work with a correctness and precision that give evidence not merely of the wonderful skill of the artists, but of a loving, painstaking devotion to details foreign to the same art in any other portion of the world. Even the conventional geometrical patterns have a beauty and delicacy never approximated in corresponding work in the west.

The Japanese wood-carvers, moreover, are not merely artists in the designing and execution of their beautiful embellishments: they are also artists in the placing of them. One finds wood sculptures in Japanese edifices in every place that lends itself to adornment—on the roofs, under the eaves, on the doors and door-posts, on the walls and ceilings, in fact, everywhere where we of the west specialize our ornamentation and call into play a different kind of art.

Small patterns or compositions with fine detail are invariably placed for inspection at close range of vision, while coarser designs or patterns to which distance lends an added effect are executed on the higher portions of the structures. Some kinds of work are designed to be looked at from one direction only, and are employed in those corners or positions where they cannot suffer by inspection from a direction not contemplated by the artist. In a word, the architectural wood sculptures of Japan give evidence of a complete and carefully elaborated system that is theoretically correct.

Speaking in general terms, the wood-carvings of Japan may be divided into four classes. First, there are low-relief carvings in solid wood, produced with clear-cut chisel strokes and left sharply defined in all their outlines. Then there are high-relief carvings in solid wood, treated in the boldest and sharpest manner, with strong contrasts of light and shade. These effects are produced by graduations of surface, by deeply sunk hollows, and occasionally by under-cutting. This is the class of wood-carving usually employed where it can be seen from only one direction. A third class are the pierced carvings, probably the most characteristic class of architectural wood-carvings



No. 10



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No. 12

used in the temples. This kind of work lends itself to the richest and most varied designs, and the effects produced are really remarkable. The spaces between the ornamental forms are carefully cut out so that the design, be it bird or beast or flower, stands out conspicuously, with nothing to detract from or mar its beauty. Examples of this class of work may be seen in the accompanying



INNER GATE OF TEMPLE

Courtesy H. Deakin

engraving. Lastly, there are the relief incrustated carvings, commonly used for panels. It is this type of work more than any other that gives opportunities to the sculptors for pictorial effects, rarely if ever attempted by wood-carvers of the west. Many of these carved panels, to be found in temples and secular buildings, might appropriately be framed and hung up for their picture value.

It was a short and natural step from the beauty of mere form to that of color, and the wood-carvers of the island were not slow to take

it. Shortly after wood-carvings became the accepted form of architectural embellishment, the artists undertook to enrich their work by painting and gilding. In this they sought to be consistent with nature. If the design were a bird, care was taken to make the colors true to life, various shades of green were used in the depiction of



CARVED WOOD PANEL IN EMPEROR'S ROOM
Courtesy H. Deakin

foliage, flowers were tinted to look real, and fruits were dashed with red or gold to simulate ripeness.

It is mainly the architectural sculptures to which the reader's attention is directed, and the carving of masks and *netsuke* may be passed with a mere reference. Great ingenuity was developed in the manufacture of both these classes of products, but they lack the charm and the dignity of the greater works.

Wood-carving, as we are accustomed to see it in Europe and America, is scarcely a suggestion of the wonderful sculptures that

may everywhere be seen in Japan, and art students have been led to assign causes for the remarkable facility of the Japanese sculptors. Some have seen in them a special intuitive power, rarely or never found among western artists, while others have attributed the remarkable results obtained to a superior method of education. Artistic as



CARVED WOOD PANEL IN EMPEROR'S ROOM

Courtesy H. Deakin

the Japanese commonly are and clever as they are as workmen, the supposition of a special gift is scarcely admissible. The closest students of the art of Japan, therefore, have been led to credit the wonderful carvings that abound in that country to the painstaking and elaborate methods of instruction used by the teachers—methods designed to develop every facility necessary for the execution of the highest class of work.

RICHARD HENRY WORTHINGTON.